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ABSTRACT

During the 1987-88 school year the New York City Board of Education instituted Magnet School Programs in the following high schools: (1) Central Park East Secondary School; (2) The High School for the Humanities; (3) Townsend Harris High School; and (4) John Dewey High School. The programs at these schools were designed to offer special curricula in the Humanities not ordinarily available at students' zoned high schools, and to provide a school environment in which students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds would have increased achievement motivation. Administrators hoped this would translate into high attendance rates, high achievement, positive intergroup relations, and a positive attitude toward the Magnet Program. Overall, the program achieved its evaluation objectives, although there was some unevenness with respect to how well certain schools performed on individual objectives. Three of the four schools exceeded the achievement objective; three of the schools met the attendance objective; and students' responses to survey items about their school and their peers indicated generally favorable attitudes, despite the fact that the evaluation objective was not met in every case. Although the program's evaluation objectives were finalized late in the school year, the program was implemented successfully at the school level. However, late finalization of the objectives did preclude conducting a comprehensive program evaluation. Data are presented on three tables. (BJV)

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MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM
1987-1988

END-OF-YEAR REPORT

OEA Evaluation Report

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Evaluation Section Report
John E. Schoener, Senior Manager

August, 1988

MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM
1987-1988

END-OF-YEAR REPORT

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SUMMARY

The New York City Board of Education instituted Magnet School Programs in four high schools during the 1987-88 school year. The programs at these schools were designed to offer special curricula not ordinarily available at students' zoned high schools. The participating high schools were: Central Park East Secondary School, The High School for the Humanities, Townsend Harris High School, and John Dewey High School.

PURPOSE

Magnet schools were developed by the Board of Education, in part, to help achieve a desegregated school system. Thus curricula were designed to attract students of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds to study in settings where they could share academic interests. While earlier Magnet Programs focused on schools which offered careers in mathematics and the sciences, this year's program allowed students interested in the humanities to study at a magnet school. At three of the participating high schools the pedagogic emphasis was to give students a solid background in the humanities.

PROGRAM GOALS

The program's goals were to provide a school environment in which students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds would have increased achievement motivation. Administrators hoped this would translate into high attendance rates, high achievement, positive intergroup relations, and a positive attitude toward the Magnet Program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the program attained its evaluation objectives, although there was some unevenness with respect to how well certain schools performed on individual objectives. Three of the four schools exceeded the achievement objective; three of the schools met the attendance objective; and students' responses to survey items about their school and their peers indicated generally favorable attitudes, despite the fact that the evaluation objective was not met in every case.

Although the program's evaluation objectives were finalized late in the school year, the program was implemented successfully at the school level. However, late finalization of the objectives did preclude conducting a comprehensive program evaluation.

The following recommendation is made based on the evaluation findings:

- Program guidelines and objectives should be in place earlier in the school year. This would permit a more meaningful assessment of the program and its impact on students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The New York City Board of Education's Division of High Schools (D.H.S.) instituted magnet educational programs in four public high schools during the 1987-88 school year. These schools offered innovative curricula not usually offered to students at zoned high schools. Administrators hoped the special programs offered at these schools would attract students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to study in an environment of common academic interest. D.H.S. believed that a setting of this kind would help foster more positive intergroup relations among the students.

The participating schools were: Townsend Harris High School at Queens College, High School for the Humanities, John Dewey High School, and Central Park East Secondary School.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Magnet programs offer curricula designed to attract students from the city's various ethnic neighborhoods. Administrators hoped that students given the opportunity to participate in these programs would have increased motivation and this, in turn, would lead to improved peer relations, attendance, and achievement.

Thus, the program's stated objectives were:

- Student participation in Magnet School Programs will result in positive attitudes toward the program and their peers on the part of 70 percent of the ninth grade students in the program.

- Increased student motivation will result in significantly better attendance on the part of ninth grade students participating in the target Magnet School Programs as compared with attendance of students in the area superintendency as a whole.
- At least 70 percent of the ninth grade students participating in the target Magnet Programs will demonstrate academic achievement by being promoted to the next grade.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Assessing the program's stated objectives was somewhat problematic because the 1987-88 Magnet School proposal was not accepted by the State Education Department until May, 1988. While school staff were able to implement the program at these schools, the timing did not allow the Office of Educational Assessment (O.E.A.) to conduct interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students. Sufficient data were obtained, however, regarding whether program objectives were attained.

Specifically, O.E.A. analyzed aggregate attendance data prepared by the Division of High School's Office of Data Acquisition, Tabulation, and Analysis (DATA); obtained information from each of the participating schools regarding the proportion of ninth graders who were promoted to the next grade; and analyzed survey data provided by ninth grade students.

The student questionnaire used was the Elementary and Secondary School Index (G. G. Stern, 1979). It is designed to elicit information regarding the respondents' attitudes toward the school environment as well as toward their peers. Owing to

time constraints, it was not possible to obtain this information on a comparative basis.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The second chapter of this report gives a brief overview of the program at each school. The third chapter analyzes students' attendance patterns and academic performance (as measured by the proportion of students in the program promoted to the next grade), and presents descriptive data on student attitudes both toward the Magnet School Program and their peers. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fourth chapter.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

D.H.S. administrators reviewed the Magnet Schools Program in fall, 1987 in order to redesign the program and select schools that would more closely reflect the overall objectives of magnet programs. Subsequent consultations with the Executive Director of High Schools, central staff, district superintendents, and principals led to the selection of four schools which attract a broad spectrum of students and achieve a favorable racial/ethnic balance because of their innovative school designs. The schools, Central Park East Secondary School, High School for the Humanities, John Dewey High School, and Townsend Harris High School, have received assistance through the program that will enable them to enhance and supplement existing services.

CENTRAL PARK EAST SECONDARY SCHOOL -- COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

Central Park East Secondary School (C.P.E.S.S.) is an alternative school that is affiliated with the Coalition for Essential Schools, a national organization comprised of 12 schools. C.P.E.S.S. builds on the experience of the Central Park East Elementary School over the past 12 years.

The school focuses on the following principles developed by the Coalition of Essential Schools: learning some things well rather than a variety of things superficially; giving personalized attention to students (no teacher advises more than

15 students); setting high standards for all students; and encouraging students to learn by doing rather than by memorizing facts and figures.

All students take a core of courses consisting of a mathematics/science component and a humanities component (art, history, literature, and social studies). The maximum class size is 18 students, allowing teachers to design individualized programs that takes into account the diverse needs and interests of participants.

HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE HUMANITIES -- INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

The High School for the Humanities was designed to attract students interested in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on the humanities. Course offerings thus include, but are not limited to, history, philosophy, literature, languages, and aspects of the social sciences that incorporate a historical approach. Classes are complemented by independent study, research, and internships that provide the opportunity for students to interact with the city's cultural and business communities.

The school's interdisciplinary focus incorporates social studies, communication arts, as well as fine arts and performing arts. Additional course work in mathematics, science, and physical education are offered. A vocational center is also available that allows students to explore careers relevant to

their academic interests.

JOHN DEWEY HIGH SCHOOL -- EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL WITH AN EXTENDED DAY AND A FOUR - CYCLE YEAR

An experimental educational-options high school, featuring a single session, eight-hour instructional day from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., John Dewey engages its students in various educational experiences. In addition to a complete program of classroom instruction, these experiences include internships and independent study. The school year is broken down into four cycles rather than a two-semester year, a structure designed to encourage the use of theme-based approaches.

The available list of program clusters includes: ecology; fashion industry and design; health and human services; law; management and finance; performing arts; fine and commercial art; transportation, tourism and hotels; mathematics/science research; humanities; and business. The school has a college articulation program; and, following the educational philosophy of John Dewey, a non-numerical grading system.

TOWNSEND HARRIS HIGH SCHOOL -- LIBERAL ARTS HUMANITIES

Townsend Harris High School was re-established in 1984 to attract students interested in a rigorous course of study. Close contact with Queens College faculty and administrators, particularly in designing the school's educational programs, has permitted the development of a strong focus on the humanities.

One of the school's requirements is that students take three

years of a modern language as well as two years of Latin or Greek. Additional courses in science and mathematics complement the humanities focus and permit students to fulfill distributional requirements. Students also participate in internships designed to develop a sense of civic responsibility and to provide experience in a professional work environment.

III. OUTCOMES

ATTENDANCE

One of the program's objectives stipulated that increased motivation on the part of ninth-grade students in magnet programs would result in average attendance higher than that of ninth grade students in the superintendency as a whole.

As shown in Table 1, the average attendance of ninth-grade students at John Dewey (88.9 percent) and Townsend Harris (95.6 percent) high schools surpassed that of their superintendencies by 11.6 and 14.4 percent respectively. Attendance for ninth graders at Central Park East averaged 90.3 percent, exceeding the average for similar students in Special Programs by 27.8 percent.* The average percentage attendance at Humanities was slightly lower (73.9 percent) than that of the Manhattan superintendency (75.7 percent).

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The second objective of the Magnet Schools Program concerned academic achievement. Specifically, the objective stated that at least 70 percent of the ninth-grade students in target programs would be promoted to the next grade. Accordingly, O.E.A. obtained data from school staff on the number of registered ninth-grade students and how many of these students were promoted

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*The Division of High Schools classifies Central Park East as one of its 15 Special Programs. Others include the Pregnant Teenagers Project, Project Outreach, and the Literacy Centers.

Table 1

A Comparison Between the Aggregate Percentage Attendance of Students in the Magnet Schools and the Attendance Patterns of Students in their Superintendency[a]

Schools	Average Attendance Percent Sept.-May	Difference in Average Percentage Attendance
John Dewey	88.6	11.6
Brooklyn Superintendency	77.0	
Townsend Harris	95.6	14.4
Queens Superintendency	81.2	
Central Park East	90.3	27.8
Special Programs[b]	62.5	
H.S. for the Humanities	73.9	-1.8
Manhattan Superintendency	75.7	

[a] These figures include students classified as long-term absentees (L.T.A.s). Superintendency percentages are based on a weighted average which includes the number of students at each school in that superintendency. Since the Magnet School Program students' attendance percentages are included in this figure, they bias these figures slightly. In cases where the Magnet School Program students' attendance is higher than the percent attendance of that superintendency, excluding the magnet school students would make these figures slightly lower. Where the actual attendance of students in the magnet school is lower, the overall average for the superintendency, excluding those in the magnet program, would be higher.

[b] The Division of High Schools classifies Central Park East as one of its 15 Special Programs. Others include the Pregnant Teenagers Project, Project Outreach, and the Literacy Centers.

- Students at John Dewey, Townsend Harris, and Central Park East exceeded the attendance objective.

to the tenth grade in the target schools.

Overall, the program's achievement objective was met: 83 percent of magnet school students were promoted. By school, only one of the schools, High School of the Humanities, failed to meet this objective. As seen in Table 2, 100 percent of the ninth-grade students at Central Park East and Townsend Harris were promoted to the tenth grade, as were 79 percent of the students at John Dewey.

STUDENT ATTITUDES

An important objective of the 1987-88 Magnet Schools Program was to provide a social environment in which students of different racial and ethnic groups could study together on the basis of shared interests. D.H.S. administrators specifically targeted ninth graders as they were new to their schools; and Magnet School funds were targeted at ninth-grade teachers. The program's stated objective was that 70 percent of these students would have positive attitudes toward the program and their peers.

O.E.A. assessed this objective using The Elementary and Secondary School Index (E.S.I.), developed by George Stern. The E.S.I. contains 61 statements regarding school life and students are asked to decide which of these are true of their school and which are not. Based on students' responses, Stern devised a series of norms and categories that discuss the school environment. Because of time constraints, O.E.A. used the E.S.I. to assess students' attitudes although this scale is not

Table 2

Summary of Ninth Grade Promotion Rates
in the Magnet Schools Program during the
1987-88 School Year

School	# of Ninth graders	# Promoted	Percent Promoted	Met or Exceeded objective
John Dewey	548[a]	431	78.6	Yes
Townsend Harris	162	162[b]	100.0	Yes
Central Park East[c]	72	72	100.0	Yes
Humanities	91	58	63.7	No
Total	873	723	82.8	Yes

[a] Thirty-nine of the ninth-grade students at John Dewey were held over from 1986-87.

[b] Several Townsend Harris students failed a class during the 1987-88 school year. However all of these students registered for summer school. School staff expect these students to pass their summer school courses.

c Central Park East Secondary School uses minimal competency criteria along with completion of projects rather than standard letter or number grades to determine whether a student should be promoted.

- The promotion objective was met or exceeded by three of the four schools.

completely appropriate for N.Y.C. high school students. Because of potential problems associated with the norms, O.E.A. decided it was prudent to report students' responses to specific items on the E.S.I. that relate to the program's evaluation objective regarding positive attitudes toward the program and their peers.*

Consequently, O.E.A. focused on six items from the E.S.I. that specifically addressed this objective (students indicated whether or not these were true of their school). Two items relate to peer relationships at a school: "students in this school are very friendly with each other" and "students try in a lot of ways to be friendly, especially to people who are new here." Four other items relate to general attitudes toward the school environment: "most students here take their school work very seriously;" "one nice thing about this school is the interest teachers take in students;" "discussions on national and international news are encouraged in this school;" students have many chances to get to know important works of art, music, or the theatre." These four items were chosen because they provide a sense of several important aspects of school life: student/teacher relationships, attitudes toward the curriculum, and whether the exchange of ideas is supported.

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*The publisher of the E.S.I. reported that the instrument was normed in 1971-72 using a student population from non-urban schools. Accordingly, O.E.A. did not compare Magnet students' responses with norms obtained on the E.S.I. because the difference in student populations and the time lag since the norms were established may not permit appropriate comparisons.

Table 3

Summary of Magnet School Program Students' Responses
to Survey Items about their School and their Peers

Items	School									
	John Dewey		T. Harris		Central Park East		H.S. Humanities		Overall	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Attitude Toward Peers										
Students are friendly with each other.	64	43	83	52	69	34	56	25	69	154
Others are friendly especially to new people.	51	34	79	50	84	41	64	30	69	155
Attitude Toward School										
Most students take their school work seriously.	65	44	94	58	74	36	44	20	71	158
Teachers are interested in students.	56	37	81	51	86	42	47	22	68	152
Discussions on national and international views are encouraged.	56	37	81	51	86	42	64	30	71	159
Students have chances to know important works of art, music, or the theatre.	78	49	88	58	61	30	64	30	74	167

o Students' responses indicate a generally favorable attitude toward their school and peers although the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met in every case.

Students' responses to these items are presented in Table 3. These figures indicate that just under 70 percent of the students were generally favorable about their peers and the overall friendliness of the student body at their schools. The items regarding the school environment were also generally positive, with some variation between schools.

In sum, these responses indicate that ninth-grade students responding to this survey were generally positive about their peers and their school as a whole although the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met in every case.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the 1987-88 Magnet School Program attained its evaluation objectives, although there was some unevenness with respect to how well certain schools performed on individual objectives. The achievement objective was met and exceeded by three of the four magnet schools; the attendance objective was met by three of the four schools. Students' responses to survey items about their school and their peers indicated generally favorable attitudes, despite the fact that the evaluation objective was not met in every case. The program's evaluation objectives were finalized late in the school year, which did not affect program implementation at the school level. However, late finalization of program objectives did preclude conducting a comprehensive program evaluation.

The follow recommendation is made based on the evaluation findings:

- Program guidelines and objectives should be in place earlier in the school year. This would permit a more meaningful assessment of the program and its impact on students.